DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 564 EA 012 358

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Cromer, Daniel H. |
| TITLE | So You Want to Implement a New Project? |
| INSTITUTION | Georgia State Dept. of Education, Atlanta. |
| SPONS AGENCY | National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Dissemination and Resources Group. |
| PUB DATE | 79 |
| CONTRACT | 400-76-2451 |
| NOTE | 8p.; For related documents, see EA 012 356-362; Not available in paper copy due to color of paper used in original document |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Georgia Department of Education, 303 State Office Building, Atlanta, GA 30334 ($0.40) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Administrator Guides; Information Dissemination; *Program Development; Program Evaluation; School Systems |
| IDENTIFIERS | Linking Agents; *Research and Development Utilization Program |

ABSTRACT

This resource guide, one of seven related documents, contains practical advice for teachers and administrators about implementing a new program. Based on the experience of schools involved in a research and development project in Georgia, it tells other schools what to do and expect during the first year of implementing an adopted program. Recommendations cover a wide range of topics from generating community and staff commitment to the project, to management of personnel and resources, to publicity and evaluation. A strong emphasis is placed on the need to anticipate potential problems and use preventive maintenance in dealing with them. (Author)

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ED181564

# So You Want To Implement A New Project?

Written by Daniel H. Cromer

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT UTILIZATION PROJECT

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# So You Want To Implement A New Project?

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THE SHAFTER COW

"At exactly 5:13 a.m., the 18th of April, 1906, a cow was standing somewhere between the main barn and the milking shed on the old Shafter Ranch in California, minding her own business.

Suddenly the earth shook, the skies trembled, and when it was all over, there was nothing showing of the cow above ground but a bit of her tail sticking up.

For the student of change, the Shafter cow is a sort of symbol of our times. She stood quietly enough, thinking such gentle thoughts as cows are likely to have, while huge forces outside her ken built up all around her and—within a minute—discharged it all at once in a great movement that changed the configuration of the earth, and destroyed a city, and swallowed her up. And that's what we are going to talk about; how, if we do not learn to understand and guide great forces of change at work in our world today, we may find ourselves like the Shafter cow, swallowed up by vast upheavals in our way of life—quite early some morning."

DON FABUN. **The Dynamics of Change.** Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970, p. 1.

## Foreword

As a teacher and high school principal, Dan Cromer has struggled with the day-to-day realities of installing innovations and implementing organizational and curricular change at the classroom and building levels. As a consultant for the North East Georgia Cooperative Education Service Agency (CESA) for several years, he worked hand-in-glove with local school systems in every phase of the educational improvement process from the initial commitment through final evaluation and recycle. Now, as a member of the central office staff in Barrow County, Georgia, Dan is dealing with school change and improvement from yet another level of implementation. Dan responded to a request by the staff of the Georgia RDU project for some ideas on the implementation process with a document which we feel is presented from the point of view of a rich personal experience. This treatment of the major implementation tasks is not only brief and to the point but rings incredibly true to any educator who has ever attempted working with educational change. Dan has a considerable wit which has carried him through many difficult and frustrating moments in schools. He brings this wit to the tasks of implementation to demonstrate to us all that our profession does not have to be as laborious as it sometimes seems.

This document is presented as a supplement to **Implementation: Checklist of Steps** and **Implementation: A Guide.** It is hoped that the three in concert will provide a basis for planning and carrying out the implementation of new programs and innovative practices in local schools.

Stephen M. Preston
Director, Georgia RDU Project

## SO YOU WANT TO IMPLEMENT A NEW PROJECT?

As an educator who has experienced the good, the bad and the indifferent, I have tried to pull together and record for posterity some ideas and suggestions based on a variety of experiences while trying to get a new idea off the ground. The most difficult problem has always been, **"When do I do what?"** Complex flow charts have never helped because they get short-circuits after the first week. Flying by the seat of your pants leads to trouble all too easily. What is needed is a short chronological list of the main kinds of things to watch out for at critical points during that first year. The following suggestions are offered to meet that need. It is recommended that project directors, and perhaps steering committees, read through this paper carefully before beginning the pre-implementation tasks. Then, at each critical point (suggested by the headings) pull it out again and think hard about what needs to be done next. Easy! Right?

**The First Week of the Project . . .**

1. If all of the roles have been sufficiently defined, all of the resources are on hand, all of the outcomes clear and the communications networks understood by all, the first week is a cinch. However, do not hold your breath.

2. Talk to project participants constantly. Find out how things are really going. Do people have the materials needed? How do other teachers who are not project participants feel? Do they say nasty things about those teachers who are project participants?

3. How do the students respond to the project? After all, this much-ignored group does have a fairly large stake in implementation and its success. Get the opinions of several students whose ideas you trust. Then get the opinions of at least two total failures. What are the differences in the opinions about how things are really going? Can you convince yourself that the two sets of opinions are really compatible?

4. Do what you can to build confidence in project participants. If they feel sufficiently comfortable with you and with the project, they will talk to you. This is absolutely necessary. If project participants are hostile, and you are unaware of this, you may well come to work one morning and find your office re-located in the restroom or the parking lot.

**The Third Week of the Project . . .**

1. Do project participants understand the paperwork that invariably is required by an adoption? This bureaucratic curse can be the source of a lot of discontent. Be sure that you have reduced paperwork to an absolute minimum, and then cut it by another ten per cent.

2. Additional publicity to parents and the community might be a good idea at this point. Students may well have been involved in activities by now that are sufficiently different from the former routine to begin asking some questions about what you are doing to them. Parents of gifted students will want assurance that you aren't sacrificing their children's best interests for the average child. Parents of average children will want assurance that you aren't sacrificing their children's best interests for the slower student. Parents of slower students . . . .

3. Keep your local board informed about the progress of the adoption. They get questions from parents and community members that you never know about. If they have some of the answers to those questions, they feel better and so will you.

4. Repeat everything that you did during the first week.

**The Tenth Week of the Project . . .**

1. By this time, project participants will probably be ready for additional assistance from consultative personnel, either with the original developers or with some other agency equipped to train teachers.

2. This is a critical point in the success or failure of any innovative effort. The disenchantments are beginning to wear through the glow of tackling something new and exciting. Maintenance of enthusiasm is very important now, and so is responsiveness to complaints. People do not necessarily expect a solution to every problem, but they most assuredly expect someone to listen.

3. Double-check the project strategies and resources. Are the pre-tests more work than anticipated? Do the teachers' manuals really contain drill on two-digit by three-digit multiplication? Are the duplicator masters disintegrating after four copies are run? With the frustration inherent in new ventures, these small grit-your-teeth incidents can be the proverbial straws.

4. Double-check your communication system. Do people really know what they are supposed to be doing? Do their day-to-day actions demonstrate this? Are the line and staff relationships holding up? Does the building principal still think this whole idea is the invention of a Georgia Regional escapee? *DOES THE SUPERINTENDENT KNOW THAT THIS PROJECT IS THE BEST THING SINCE SLICED BREAD?*

5. Begin to look at the remainder of the year in terms of participant training and continuation into next year. Begin to try to develop three months' projections as to program needs and interventions. Push the positive publicity. Tell people about visitors to the project. Let them know how much students like it. Build a platform to make a case for continuation. (All this assumes, of course, that you are still convinced that this escapade has some merit.)

6. Don't be surprised if your spouse starts to ask you questions about your strange mumblings in your sleep about deadlines and who knows what else.

**The Fifteenth Week of the Project . . .**

1. By this time some alterations in procedure will probably be necessary. Remember that flexibility is absolutely essential. Very seldom, if ever, will everything work the way you planned it. It just could be that the block schedule you worked out during pre-implementation means that all the fifth graders who are on the second floor go to the bathrooms at the same time, and all that flushing floods the toilets on the first floor. Don't laugh. Some of the things you encounter may be even more ridiculous than this.

2. After a period of time, people start to feel comfortable with the new procedures. They feel comfortable enough to start to make little adjustments in those procedures. Keep watch on this. Some of those adjustments may be counter-productive if carried out on a large scale. One teacher's deciding to send the whole class to the library, when only small study groups were supposed to go, might be all right. When twelve teachers decide to do this, you have a definite problem. Have you ever been beaten savagely about the head and shoulders with a Webster's Unabridged Dictionary?

3. Whenever and wherever possible, put in a good word to project staff. By the time you have made the eleventh presentation to community service groups and various clubs and most of the community refers to the adoption as "your project," the teaching staff might just decide to let you do the whole thing. Spread the good tidings around as much as you can. Sling credit all over the place. Remember, if they accept some credit, they also have to accept some responsibility.

**The Twentieth Week of the Project . . .**

1. Be aware of the evaluation that must be done as a part of the project. In a thirty-six week school year, now is the time to be sure that the necessary instruments are available and on hand locally. If training is needed for administering any instrument, plan it now. Re-read your proposal to see what you committed yourself to for evaluation. Prepare now, not six weeks from now.

2. How effective was the earlier follow-up training? Do you need more now? It would probably be best to wait until March to do additional training. Winter is a terrible time to do anything, especially if it costs money. Now is the time when superintendents start to make next year's budgets. Wait until March or the first daffodils, whichever comes first.

3. Continue to do what you can to maintain enthusiasm. It is probably at an all-time low just about now. Some special recognition would be nice for project participants. Consider having all of them at your house for a steak dinner.

4. How are resources holding out? By now the only question is quantity. If quality has been inferior and you are still using the material, you have possibly opened yourself to significant amounts of hostility. However, if for some reason you are tied to the use of certain less-than-appreciated materials, share your reasons for this continuation with the project participants.

5. How do tangential project participants feel about the project? Does the Board member's wife who is the media specialist still feel that she was never asked to participate, and it is obvious to everybody that it is her efforts that have held the project together? What about the bus drivers who glare at you because the project teachers keep their students overtime

each afternoon? Have you noticed that the custodian has trouble keeping his hands from around your throat (simply because the project generates nine hundred pounds of refuse per day and now he has to have a hernia operation)?

**The Thirty-Sixth Week of the Project . . .**

1. Is the evaluation completed?

2. How did the actual accomplishments compare with the anticipated accomplishments? That favorably? Then publicize, **PUBLICIZE!** Oh, that badly? Then keep it quiet.

3. Is everybody set for next year? Be sure that each project participant (who is still with you) knows what will happen when school re-opens in the fall. Be sure that you know what is going to happen when school re-opens in the fall.

4. Have you considered submitting your resignation? Has the superintendent asked for your resignation? If not, congratulations are in order. By the way, be sure to put this event in your timeline. You are fifty-two weeks away from another just like it.

I hope you took the advice at the beginning of this little paper and have read it all before you take the first step. (If you did not and the year is over and it didn't go well at all, that's probably why.) If you have, you are now ready to start implementation with a spring in your step and a song in your heart. Good luck!

Dan Cromer

For further information and material on implementation, contact,

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*This document was prepared for the Georgia Department of Education pursuant to a grant funded by the National Institute of Education. Content does not necessarily represent views of NIE.*